Advancing knowledge through grassroots experiments: Connecting culture and sustainability

Presentation by M. Sharon Jeannotte and Nancy Duxbury
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Outline of presentation

• Background on our research on Integrated Community Sustainability Plans in Canada (ICSPs)
• Conceptualizing local planning systems
• Bringing culture in – highlights from our research
• Bridging research and practice – strengths and limitations
• Toward possible futures
Launched in 2006 by federal government
- Production of ICSPs required for municipal receipt of a share of Gas Tax money
- ICSP was to be:
  - Long-term in focus
  - Based on four pillar model of sustainability – environmental responsibility, social equity, economic health and cultural vitality
  - Developed with public participation
- In Québec, a complementary process: local sustainability planning based on principles of Local Agenda 21.
Examples of ICSPs

Sustainable Kingston Plan
Five main lines of analysis

- “How” - adequacy of ICSP guidance
- “Why” - adequacy of conceptual underpinnings
- “Who” - involvement of residents and cultural stakeholders
- “When and where” - systemic issues limiting the integration of culture within ICSPs
- “Making it real” - adequacy of cultural indicators used to monitor and benchmark local progress
Rise of sustainability paradigm

• Four-pillar model of sustainability – an influential model to conceptually and operationally integrate culture in sustainability planning.
• Conceptually, the role of culture is still uncertain.
• Operationally, integrated approach to implementing plans is still a challenge.
Conceptualizing planning systems

ICSPs as socially constructed learning systems

- Focus of provincial guidance documents – technical and cognitive dimensions (how) - little guidance on conceptual issues (why).
- Many ICSPs attempted a more holistic approach but inertia in the cognitive and socio-political dimensions has hampered systemic change.
- Focus on measurement and indicators – often fails to reconcile differing languages of value and impact used by cultural sector.
- Integration of new discursive frames largely due to active public involvement – created opportunity to articulate meanings in locally resonant ways.
Bringing culture in – highlights from our research

Conceptual

• Articulation of new narratives about local sustainability

Operational

• Creative means of public engagement
• Use of “citizen experts” in local culture
• Collaborative approaches to sustainability – both “scaling up” and “scaling down”
• Innovation diffusion
Bridging research and practice – some strengths and limitations (1)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strengths of practice</th>
<th>Limitations of ICSP practice in local communities</th>
<th>What can research bring practice? (potentially)</th>
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| In-depth understanding of complex local conditions, relationships, and dynamics | • Separated efforts  
• Resource limitations (including time) | • Compiled, systematic and synthesized overview of efforts  
• Greater knowledge on collective strengths, weaknesses, and gaps |
| In-depth understanding of local histories, precedents, and trajectories | • One-time focus  
• Relationships among stakeholders sometimes constrained by past histories or disagreements about future trajectories | • Chronologies, trails, and typologies |
| Dedication, professional knowledge, and strategies developed in relation to local conditions | • Connections with "regular" cultural planning not clear  
• "Plan fatigue" or uncertainty about relationship between cultural and sustainability plans | • Broader view and "informed" reflections on culture in local planning contexts  
• New ideas and conceptual frameworks |
## Bridging research and practice – some strengths and limitations (2)

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| Access to and participation in background/non-public documents and discussions         | • Scattered information, some disappearing from websites  
• “Grey literature” buried in planning files and working documents  
• Limited time to assess and utilize existing corpus                                                                                  | • Archive / resource library  
• Familiarity with broader array of data and documentation  
• Time and (sometimes) resources to conduct analyses                                                                                     |
| Prioritization of knowledge and analysis based on relevancy to political/bureaucratic processes and community | • Community analysis focused on immediate, local tasks  
• Regional and neighbourhood concerns and priorities often difficult to address within ICSP framework                                      | • More detailed and additional analyses, comparisons, assessments, insights  
• Broader view of “good practices” with regard to concerted action                                                                               |
Toward possible futures – the co-evolution of ICSP research and practice

• Some possible guiding questions:
  • What has happened and what have we learned?
  • What are the main patterns and trajectories?
  • What are the main models?
  • How has culture been affected locally by inclusion in sustainability planning?
  • Has this national experiment been successful?

• Some possible outcomes:
  • Stronger networks of learning between researchers and practitioners
  • Broader view of good practices with regard to inclusion of culture in sustainability planning.
Thank you!

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